THE JESTER.
EVERY SATURDAY.

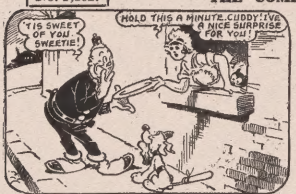
"SON OF A GUN-MAN!"

A Great New Story of a Wild West Outlaw who, filled with remorse, Tries to Save his Young Son from the Six-gun Trail. You can START TO-DAY!

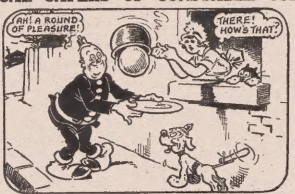
No. 1,462.

THE COMICAL CAPERS OF CONSTABLE CUDDLECOOK!

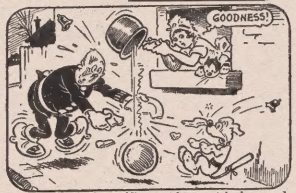
NOVEMBER 16, 1929.



1. Dear Mr. Editor, My Happy Old Half-Back,—Whilst chatting with one of my pet pie architects t'other Tuesday I received quite a surprise when she put a plate into my hands and bade me stand-by for further developments, sir!

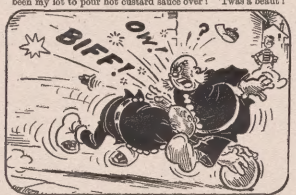


2. Ten ticks later, Winnie—yes, Winnie was the lassie's name—came to the window again and tipped up a saucepan containing one of the nicest looking plum puddings it's ever been my lot to pour hot custard sauce over! 'Twas a beaut!



3. But I guess that pudding must have contained a pound of everything that matters! I don't want to say anything nasty about Winnie's cooking, sir, but that pud was a trifle on the heavy side. So much so that it broke the plate completely!

4. Now, being nice and round and bouncy you can quite understand that that jolly old chunk of appetite-remover soon started to roll down the road. Just as soon I started to roll after it, and all would have gone well if Flippy hadn't arrived.



5. Yes, sir, you're right, sir! My old inspector is always bobbing up when he's not wanted and not expected! Down I stooped to grab the round pudding so as to have a square meal, and the next thing I knew I had cannoned into Flippy's tunic!

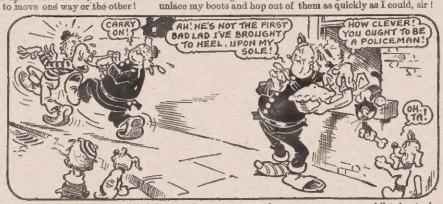
6. When he had got his breath back there was much which my old superior officer thought it necessary to say! "Playing football!" he roared. "What's your position if the Chief Constable sees you?" "Inside right, sir!" I said.

7. And then more trouble arrived with a wallop. Yes, a saucy lad had spotted Flippy sitting there, and he, too, mistook my pud for a football. Being, as I say, a saucy lad, he felt he just had to take a flying kick at the ball! That did it!

8. Yes, Flippy got a faceful of sticky pudding and I went and put my foot in the rest of it. And there was my old inspector barking orders for me to go and arrest the bad lad, and there was I, stuck to my post, unable to move one way or the other!

9. Flippy didn't ease up on me for a moment, sir! He threatened all sorts of things, and I got desperate and knew that I'd have to get a move on before long. Then I decided to unlace my boots and hop out of them as quickly as I could, sir!

10. But once more Flippy misunderstood me! Yes, it never dawned upon him why I was unlacing my boots, and with a wild roar like an electric road-drill calling for its young, my officer hurled himself at me and completely swept me off my feet! Now that solved all our problems, sir! Yes, you see, my right boot came off and socked the bad lad a real beauty!



11. After that Flippy cooled down and was content to leave me to carry on whilst he took the new sample back to our home from home. It didn't take me long to clean up and report back to Winnie! I am happy to say that that bonnie little lass rose to the occasion and presented me with a nice pie to take the place of the pud!—Yours, CONSTABLE CUDDLECOOK.

"JUST WE THREE"

You will find laughter and tears in this human story of the adventures of two homeless brothers and their girl chum. START IT TO-DAY!

Mysterious Quarters.

ALONE in the world, young Joe Blake, aged fourteen, and his five-year-old brother, Jimmy, fall in with a warm-hearted and plucky girl, whose name is Jess, and whose heart is set on leaving the gloom and hardships of the town behind, and getting into the country.

With this idea in view, the three wanderers hid in a goods train standing in a railway siding, hoping it would carry them far away from the smoke and turmoil of town.

Suddenly, however, they are pounced upon by three men, who declare that they are railway detectives, and who accuse the youngsters of being there for a dishonest purpose.

"We know what you're up to—stealing, eh?" a man called Slim muttered, as he ordered them, trembling, out of the wagon. "You come along with us."

In vain Jess protested their innocence, clinging to little Jim's trembling hand as she declared in a scared voice that they had only crept into the wagon to take shelter from the rain.

Joe, with bright, indignant eyes, tried to shake off the tight grip of the man who held him prisoner.

"I—I don't care whether you're detectives or not!" he cried. "We haven't done anything wrong. We haven't touched a thing, I swear we haven't!"

"Look here, young fellow!" growled the man, giving him a shake. "Do you want to find yourself in the police station? If you don't, keep quiet and don't struggle."

Joe's heart was thumping as he and the others picked their way across the interlacing lines of metals to where a gate stood open in the high fence on the other side. At the kerb a covered lorry was waiting, without lights, the driver of which peered at them anxiously as they came up.

"Is it you, Slim?" he asked in a nervous tone.

"Ay. It's all O.K.," muttered the man who held Joe's arm. "We've just picked up some reinforcements."

He chuckled as if it were a good joke, and thrust Joe towards a small, closed motor-car which stood, also without lights, in the rear of the lorry. As he paused his two companions came up with Jess and Jimmy, both forbidding-looking men, with caps pulled down over their faces, and wearing rubber-soled shoes.

"In you get—quick!" grunted Mr. Slim, pointing inside the car. "And the quieter you keep the better you'll get on."

He waited while they obeyed, Jimmy white and frightened.

"What's the idea, Slim?" muttered one of the men.

"Caged larks don't sing!" grunted Mr. Slim He turned to the man at his elbow. "Sergeant," he said, with a broad wink, "carry on the inspection while I run those babes in the wood along to the Professor. And you, too, inspector," he added, with a grin Joe could not see, as he turned to the other man.

Jess turned a scared and puzzled face to Joe as the two men glided off as silent as mice. Where was this detective going to take them? And who was the "Professor"?

She held Jimmy's hand a little tighter as Mr. Slim sprang into the car. A low hum and a murmur of gears, and the car sped off through the darkness. Which way they went and how far they travelled Joe did not know, for heavy curtains over the car windows shut out even the dark and the rain. Presently he felt the car turn sharply, and the car seemed to pass through a doorway into a tunnel. The door opened.

"Here, take my hand," Mr. Slim's voice said from such pitch darkness that they could not see his figure. "Be quick!"

The hand was cold and moist which helped Joe from the car. A moment and he felt Jess and Jimmy huddling close beside him. A low, rumbling sound came from close by, then a match flared up and Joe and Jess stared about them in astonishment They stood in a narrow passage, with a wall behind them and steps which ran up at the other end. There was no sign of the car they had come in. It had vanished.

"This way!" said Mr. Slim.

They followed him up a steep stairway and along a narrow passage to a thick door, which he opened with a key. Here he struck a second match, and they found themselves in a small room with a mirror on one wall and a small picture on the other Then everything was dark again.

"Wait here!" muttered Mr. Slim.

An instant later it seemed as if they were alone, though how he had gone Joe could not think, for there was no door that he had seen, nor outlet of any kind.

"Joe, where has he gone?" Jess gasped.

"I don t know. He—he must be a conjurer!" He tried to laugh, so that Jimmy wouldn't be frightened, but he only succeeded in making a queer sound in his throat. With a quick breath he stooped, and raised his little brother in his arms. "Here, son, let's hold you," he said, "till Mr. Slim brings a light!"

Again there came that very quiet rumbling sound which they had heard below; then all was silence for some time. Suddenly a startled cry broke from Jess as the place was flooded in light—a cry which was echoed by Joe, who stood blinking in utter amazement.

For, as if by magic, they were in a little room no longer, but a big one—a big, carpeted room with handsome chairs and a huge sofa, and a log-fire burning in a big, old-fashioned grate, while the lights from a large chandelier in the middle glittered on a table, set with a white cloth and plates and shining cutlery

Joe and Jess were so startled, they could not move or speak, but just stood very still, blinking and staring, until a heavily-curtained door opened slowly at the far end and an old, white-bearded man, in a loose dressing-gown and a smoking-cap, came in and advanced to greet them with a smile.

Joe felt little Jimmy start in his arms and then tremble with excitement.

"Joe, oh, look!" he whispered. "Look at his whiskers! It's old Daddy Christmas!"

"Sh-h!" whispered Joe. "He'll hear you!" But the old man seemed already to have heard, for a sharp look came into his eyes as he peered at Jimmy

He shuffled forward and paused before them, his keen eyes seeming to search them through and through. Was this the man they called the "Professor," Jess wondered? And was he a detective, too? Suddenly he spoke.

"So you're the three whom we caught stealing in a railway wagon, are you?" he said sternly.

"It—it isn't true, sir!" Joe cried. "We were not stealing. We were just taking shelter from the rain, weren't we, Jess?"

"Taking shelter from the rain?" he repeated. "Why weren't you at home, and in bed?"

"We hadn't any—any home, sir!" Jess said, with a catch in her voice. "We had nowhere else to go!"

The old man grunted.

"No home! Dear, dear, dear! That's too bad! No wonder you look wet and cold. Come up and sit by the fire and dry yourselves. Come and tell me all about it!"

He drew chairs up to the fire, and for some minutes plied them with questions, his eyes travelling in an intent way from one to the other.

Presently he leaned forward and pushed a bell-button, and a minute later the door opened and a woman came in—a thin, scraggy woman, with untidy hair and a sour face. She stared at Joe and the others unpleasantly. The old man smiled.

"These are three little friends of mine, and they are hungry, Mrs. Grimes," he said, in his smooth voice. "Bring them some nice hot cocoa and bread-and-butter."

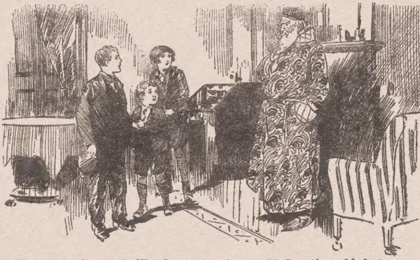
"Are they staying here, Mr. Flannagan?" Mrs. Grimes said sourly. "Because if they are, I 'aven't any beds aired!"

"They can sleep here by the fire," said the old man. "Bring in their supper, Mrs. Grimes."

Five -nutes went by, and then the sour-faced woman brought in three steaming cups and some very thick slices, scraped with something which did not look like butter. But the sight of the meal he needed so badly brought a happy flush to little Jimmy's face as he took his seat between Joe and Jess. He looked up in a puzzled and awed way at the old man, whom he half expected to vanish in flames, like the Slave of the Lamp in the Aladdin story Joe had once read to him.

"Are you a magician, mister?" he asked, in his naive way.

"A magician?" Mr. Flannagan chuckled. "Well, perhaps I am, in a way. And my friend Mrs. Grimes here is a fairy." He chuckled still more. "We know a lot of good tricks, don't we, Mrs. Grimes?" he added, as he moved with her to the door. "Perhaps we'll teach 'em a few, won't we, eh? Ha, ha, ha!"



The old gentleman shuffled forward and paused before them, his keen eyes seeming to search them through and through. "So you're the three whom we caught stealing in a railway wagon, are you?" he said sternly.

He was shaking with amusement as he went out silently and closed the door upon them. Jimmy looked puzzled.

"A fairy," he said. "I don't call her much of a fairy! Are these supposed to be fairy-cakes, Joe?" He picked up one of the thick slices and stared at it. "They look more like doorsteps, with drippin' on!"

"Never mind, son," Joe said. "It's better than nothing at all. And it'll be fine here, sleeping by the fire. Better than an archway or that wagon!"

But as he sipped his thin cocoa contentedly, he might not have felt so happy could he have heard the muttered conversation which took place outside the door.

"I should think Slim's mad to bring them urchins here!" Mrs. Grimes grumbled.

But Mr. Flannagan just chuckled, and rubbed his skinny hands.

"They're going to be very useful, Mrs. Grimes," he muttered—"very useful indeed! You wait and see!"

The Face in the Wall!

A DAY had passed since the strange adventure which had brought Joe and the others to Mr. Flannagan's house—a day which had seemed to him many times as all part of a queer dream, from which he would presently wake up.

In the morning, after a frugal breakfast, Mrs. Grimes had given them aprons and set them all "to earn their food," as she put it, by cleaning knives and forks and spoons.

In the afternoon Joe and Jimmy had been sent out on an important errand for Mr. Flannagan. Now it was evening again, and nearly bedtime, and Jess sank down, tired out, by the small fire, after a day in which she had not been allowed once to rest.

"Did you have to go far this afternoon, Joe?" she asked.

"Not very far," Joe said. "You know the big picture-palace in Regal Street? Well, we just had to go there, and wait on the corner."

"And why did you have to wait?" Jess asked.

"We had to meet Mr. Slim, you know, the detective who found us in the wagon, Jess. It was a long time before he came. Then he came up and gave me a parcel and told me to run back home with it quickly. He seemed cross when he saw Jimmy was with me. He said he couldn't run!"

"I can run!" declared Jimmy indignantly. "I could race Mr. Flatiron easy!"

"His name's Flannagan, Jimmy," Jess said. "You mustn't call him Flatiron. He might get cross. Was it a heavy parcel, Joe?"

"Not very," Joe said. "I dropped it once, and a lady's purse fell out. It was full of money. Mr. Slim ought to have told me there was money in it," he said, with a frown; "I'd have been more careful."

Jess nodded.

"Has Mr. Slim hurt his arm, Joe?" she asked.

"Hurt his arm, Jess. No, I don't think so. Why?"

"I thought he must have done," Jess said thoughtfully. "Because this afternoon Mr. Flat—er—Flannagan, I mean—asked me if I could sew, and then he gave me Mr. Slim's overcoat and made me sew up the end of the sleeve and pin it across the front of his coat, like you see people who've got their arms in slings and——"

She stopped short as she became aware of a shadow behind her. It was Mr. Flannagan, who had appeared as usual in his silent way.

Jess turned with a startled face, but saw with relief that he was not cross. He was smiling and eyeing them intently.

"Off to bed, you three!" he said. "You've talked enough for one night! You know where you're all sleeping, don't you, young woman?"

Jess nodded as she rose.

"Yes, sir; on the top floor. Mrs. Grimes showed me," she said.

He stood and watched them as they went out, wishing them good-night in his cracked voice and bidding them be early in the morning. Taking Jimmy's hand, Jess led them to a steep staircase, up the creaking stairs of which Joe followed her, groping his way in the darkness.

"Can't we have a light, Joe?" Jimmy asked. But Joe did not answer. His own heart was beating quickly.

It seemed to him as they went up slowly that they were being followed—as if some other person's footsteps echoed with theirs through the big, silent house—as if a pair of unseen eyes was watching them in the darkness. He stopped suddenly, and as he did so the mysterious footsteps stopped, too. Jess paused on the landing and looked back.

"Joe, aren't you coming?" she whispered, in a scared tone. "What are you waiting for?"

"Nothing. I—I'm coming!" He moved on, not wishing to frighten her or Jimmy. And again those following footsteps seemed to dog his own. It seemed almost as if they came from inside the wall beside him. He hurried to rejoin the others.

"Isn't it dark?" whispered Jimmy. "Is it much farther, Jess?"

"Yes. Right at the top. Your room is one side, and mine the other. Careful; here's another landing. That's right!"

She led Jimmy across, and their steps creaked on the last narrow flight. Joe, just behind them, paused on the landing and moved quickly to the banisters, peering over. The mysterious steps had ceased as if they were being followed no longer. Why? Who had it been?

His heart thumped as he peered down breathlessly on to the landing below. And then suddenly it stopped beating, and a cold chill ran through him. For, as he peered, it seemed as if a door opened in the wall below and a face appeared—a face like a white smudge in the darkness. Trembling, he drew back, conscious that two eyes were staring up at him. For a moment he was too terrified to move. Who was it? What did it mean?

(What happened in the darkness of the night will be told in next Saturday's exciting instalment. Order your copy of the JESTER to-day.)

SON OF A GUN-MAN!

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Growing Up.

SONNY HARDING cried for nearly two days when his dad had gone. Even the comforting, motherly tenderness of Mrs. Russell did not ease the ache in his heart at first.

He was too young to understand that only by a miracle was his outlaw-father still alive; too young to realise that men were hunting high and low for Glyn Harding, and that, hampered as he was with his five-year-old son, the gunman had but little chance to shake off the ruthless law-hounds that trailed him.

But by degrees the wound in his little heart began to heal. He would never forget his dad, and sometimes, even months after that terrible ride that Glyn Harding had made to bring him to the Russell Ranch, the little lip would quiver and the blue eyes grow moist when he thought of his dad.

Myra helped him to forget his sadness, too. Myra Russell, stern old John Russell's niece, who lived on the ranch with her uncle, and only dimly remembered her own parents.

She was younger than Sonny when first the boy came to the ranch. But from the very first day she, too, mothered him, in that quaint way little girls will always display towards little boys.

And so Myra and Sonny grew up together; sharing each other's joys and pleasures—sharing punishments, too, when old John caught them, as he often did, up to some form of youthful mischief or other.

Now and again Glyn Harding came back on fleeting visits to his son. Usually it was every two or three, and sometimes four years. He always came at night—and left at night, and during the day he kept within the ranch-house and talked long and earnestly with his son.

His eyes grew soft and proud when he saw the growing boy with sloping shoulders like his own; with hands that were always so quick and deft with everything they touched.

Once Sonny drew his father's revolver from its holster and wanted to play with it. So violently did the gunman snatch the weapon away that for days afterwards Sonny felt hurt and sore about it.

Once when he came Glyn brought a pure black pony as a present for the boy, and for once Glyn Harding agreed to go out with his son in broad daylight, so that Sonny might be taught to ride.

But even as the boy mounted a man appeared in the distance, and after one searching look the gunman ordered his son homeward, and himself disappeared into a gully at a plunging gallop without so much as one word of good-bye.

Sonny couldn't understand such actions, and when he questioned Uncle John, as he now called him, the old rancher would turn away and make some unintelligible remark that did not appease the lad's curiosity.

Even Myra, growing prettier with every passing year, could not give any satisfactory explanations of Glyn Harding's strange actions, and Sonny was left to wonder and wonder more and more about his dad.

For six long years Glyn Harding remained away after that visit when he brought the pony.

Sonny was eighteen, and as bright and happy a lad as one could find in a day's ride. He worked hard for old John Russell, and the rancher appreciated the fact—but his eyes hardened a little when he saw the boy and Myra ride out together so often.

"I believe they're sweethearting, mother," he said one day to his white-haired wife. "It won't do! No good can ever come of a wedding like that!"

"Oh, what if they are, fidget!" said Mrs. Russell. "Weddings and marriages don't enter into their thoughts yet. Myra's very fond of Sonny, and the boy idolises her. She's what I call an influence for good where Sonny's concerned. If he wasn't so happy riding around with her he'd no doubt find his pleasures down in the saloons with the boys. I'd sooner have Myra looking after him than let him drift among the riffraff of the ranches that's to be found down town."

"I'm thinking of his dad," said old John quietly. "We know that Glyn never conquered his reckless outlaw spirit. In spite of his upbringing, Sonny's got outlaw blood in his veins—two generations of it. I'd hate for Myra to get too fond of him—and for him to turn out like his dad—a hunted man!"

"I've told you something of my life, son," Glyn Harding said, "but I've never told you about Bullseye Burk. Once I balked him, and since then he's hated me and all my breed. To-day I've heard he's coming here after me. He'll get me sure, and you, too. Son, I'm going to teach you to use a six-gun now!"

Then Glyn Harding came back; but this time he was different. He looked so much older, and Sonny, who loved him more than anything else on earth, was amazed at the change.

Glyn Harding had ridden the outlaw trails once too often. One leg was carried with a pronounced limp; his right arm, once so quick and steady, was stiff and nearly useless. His face was grey and worn with pain, and he looked so long and silently at his son that Sonny wondered just what was working at the back of his mind.

"We're going away—together, Sonny," said Glyn Harding one day. "There's work for you to do, boy—and I want you with me where I can stay. We'll be leaving at dawn to-morrow, lad, so—so you'd better say good-bye to the boys in the bunkhouse."

Sonny was elated. He wanted nothing better than to ride the trails beside this man who was his father. He had worked hard and conscientiously on the ranch, but he wasn't sorry to leave it—until he thought of Myra.

Then a wistful sadness stole over him. In the first flush of excitement he had forgotten Myra. She would be so lonely without him, and, after all, they had been happy days they had spent together.

Sonny did not spend his last day on the ranch at the bunkhouse with his good friends among the boys; he spent it in riding far with Myra.

The girl was brave and kept back her tears when the time for parting came.

She placed her hands on Sonny's shoulders and looked deep into his blue eyes; those laughing blue eyes that were a little sad now.

"You've got to go and make a name for yourself, Sonny," she said softly. "When you come back we'll all be so proud of you. You'll be a big rancher, with fine herds of your own, and a perfectly lovely ranch-house like—like the one we've always talked about!"

"And when I do come back, Myra," said the boy softly, "I—I shan't go away again unless I take you, too! I—I've got a keepsake for you, Myra. Will you take this little ring and wear it always? It was my mother's."

In the morning there was little time for good-byes. On his black pony Sonny rode away beside his dad. Glyn Harding kept his eyes fixed steadily on the trail ahead; but so long as the little ranch was in sight Sonny kept continually turning in the saddle for one long, last look at it, striving to see the slim figure of Myra, whom he knew was watching him out of sight from the shelter of the cottonwood trees.

The girl watched the two specks on the trail until they were out of sight. Then the tears came, and she hurried to the arms of Mrs. Russell, knowing that that motherly old soul would understand.

Sonny Learns the Truth.

WHEN they made camp that night Sonny started at once to make a fire. But even as he stooped with lighted match, his father swiftly kicked aside the pile of twigs and chips.

"No lights!" he snapped. "We don't want to be seen, son!"

"But there's no one around who can do us any harm, dad," said the boy. "We're on Flying A ranch land, and——"

"There's always a chance of someone popping up looking for trouble," said Harding lamely, "and my arm isn't so good for gun-play, son!"

"Then why not let me have a gun, dad?" asked the boy eagerly. "I'm eighteen, you know, and——"

Glyn Harding realised then that the moment had come in which he must speak the truth. It was borne in on him that, sooner or later now, Sonny must hear of his father's reckless life, and he preferred to tell the boy the plain, unvarnished truth himself.

And so that night, simply and dispassionately, Sonny heard his father's story. Glyn Harding did not gloss over his misdeeds. Plainly he told Sonny that he had taken to the outlaw trails because he preferred the sheer excitement of lawlessness to the comparative quiet of a cowboy's life.

"Your mother reformed me when I met her, son," he said. "For years I lived straight and played the game. Then she was taken, just when you came along, and life seemed rosiest for us all. I—I was weak then. I went back to the old life to try to forget her. I rustled; I robbed; became a gunman, with a reputation in two States. That's why I don't ever want you to use a gun, lad. Forget there are such things as shooting-irons. Never use one. Once you start you can never turn back. If you pack a gun some day you'll kill a man, and that's the end of you."

Sonny listened to it all with beating heart.

Not one word of what his father had said shook his loyalty in the slightest. Whatever he had been, whatever he was to be, Glyn Harding was his father, and Sonny vowed he would never forget that.

"I'd sooner see you dead than carrying a gun, lad!" said the outlaw, with sudden intensity. "As it is, the name of Harding is going to be a curse to you—a curse! You've lived clean so far, and I'm going to keep you clean so long as I can. Killings and guns! That's a life that I don't want for you. That was my life, except for those few brief years when your mother was with me. A life I couldn't escape from, just as my father couldn't get away from it. You're going to start clean, sonny. Wear a gun, ride the outlaw trails, and there'll be men clamouring for your life, just as they clamoured for my dad's until they got it; just as they'll clamour for mine until they drop me. You're an outlaw's son, lad, but if I can prevent it you'll never be an outlaw."

For four days the pair pressed on, and then Glyn Harding seemed to relax a little.

"We're nearing the border, son," he said. "Once in Mex land we can go about without fear of a sheriff popping on me from out of the sky. For a time we'll lie low and try to make a stake. We ought to be safe in another day's ride."

They crossed the border the next day and rode into the little town of Bueno. Sonny was interested in the new sights and sounds around him. But Glyn, looking neither to right nor to left, made straight for the big cantina in the centre of the main street, dropped from the saddle and hurried inside.

He was gone but a short time. When he returned he was smiling.

"It's all right," he said. "We can stay here as long as we like it. I've got a job, son. Yeah! I'm dealing cards in the gambling games for the house here. You see, my—my hands are still kind of slick as far as cards are concerned."

And so they settled down in Bueno, and the slender fingers that had made him a wizard with a six-gun now served Glyn Harding in his new role.

Sonny got work on a near-by ranch, from which he rode into town every day.

The time passed uneventfully until, some six months later, Sonny found another violent change in his father.

The gunman's face was flushed, and his eyes gleamed. He took Sonny straight to his own private room in the cantina, and in solemn silence buckled on a new gun-belt and a pair of shining new six-guns.

His eyes grew hot, and his face seemed to turn to a mere mask as he surveyed the boy. Then he explained.

"I've told you something of my life, son," he said. "I never told you about Burk. Bullseye Burk, they call him. Once I balked him, and since then he's hated me and all my breed. To-day I've heard he's coming here after me. He'll get me for sure. My arm's useless. That means he'll get you, too. In cold blood he'd shoot you down. That's his breed. Son, I'm going to teach you to use a six-gun now!"

There followed the first of Sonny's daily lessons.

Glyn Harding was a good teacher and an exacting taskmaster. Nothing short of absolute perfection would satisfy him. Always he was showing the boy how to get his guns loose a fraction of a second faster than before; how to twist his body so as to offer as small a target to an attacker as possible.

Sonny was a good pupil. It was a gift, a heritage from his father, the way he could handle a gun.

It wasn't long before Harding was satisfied that his son was now able to take care of himself, and then he gave him further instructions.

"If you're here when Burk comes," he said, "back out and get back to your ranch. Get your pony and fan it as deep into Mex land as you can get. You've got a chance with the average man with a gun, but not with Burk. I'll meet you later on, and we'll start some place all over again. If you don't happen to be here when the fight comes, I'll get a message to you and you'll beat it out of Bueno as fast as you can. Remember, though you've got your guns on, I don't want you to start to kill. Burk means to wipe me out and everyone connected with me. Don't give him a chance. Stand clear of gun-play. You see what it's brought me to! Son, you've got to fight down your outlaw blood for your dead mother's sake, and perhaps for that little girl you've left back on John Russell's ranch."

• • • • • •

It was an hour before midnight when the tragedy began. Barely a week later when the door of the cantina opened and a tall, slender, grinning man stood silhouetted in the doorway.

Sonny was standing beside his father, watching idly the card game that was going on.

He looked up and saw the stranger.

Blind instinct told the boy it was Burk. Fascinated, he watched the man come towards him in slow, cautious strides, noiselessly and with deadly calm. Even as he waited he noted every detail of the man's clothing and the ugly scar that disfigured his face.

Sonny thought, too, of how his dad had told him that this was the man who would wipe out his breed, and almost unconsciously his hand began to travel towards the guns he now carried. Then he remembered his father's final warning—to steer clear of gun-play.

Burk was very near the boy now, an exultant grin upon his face. His lips were twitching, and his hand was already moving towards the gun at his hip.

Sonny looked at his father, and saw the tense look on his face as he sat with both hands gripping the table.

Suddenly, however, the poker table went over with a crash.

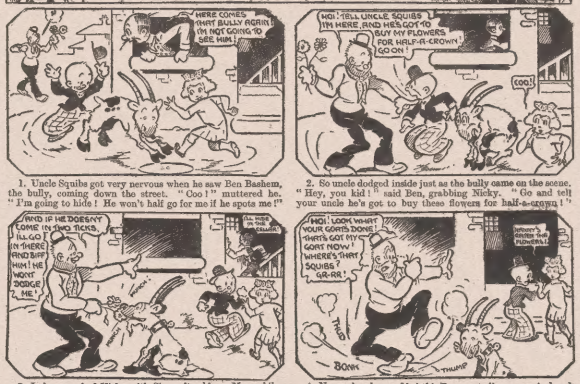
Glyn Harding had risen, his face working furiously, coins and cards dropping around him as he faced his enemy.

"Burk!" he snapped. And at the sound of his voice Burk turned, and instantly everything became one wild, whirling, mad chaos!

(Another long instalment of this fine new Western yarn will appear in next Saturday's JESTER.)

16-11-29

UNCLE SQUIBS AND HIS NAUGHTY NIBS

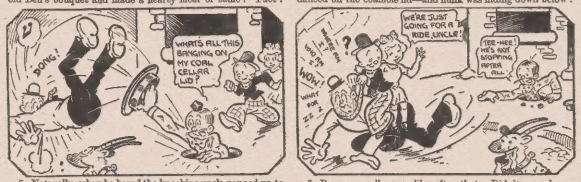


1. Uncle Squibs got very nervous when he saw Ben Bashem, the bully, coming down the street. "Coo!" muttered he. "I'm going to hide! He won't half go for me if he spots me!"

2. So uncle dodged inside just as the bully came on the scene. "Hey, you kid!" said Ben, grabbing Nicky. "Go and tell your uncle he's got to buy these flowers for half-a-crown!"

3. Indoors rushed Nicky with Sissy after him. Meanwhile, the goat which the Nibs had been playing with took a fancy to old Ben's bouquet and made a hearty meal of same! Fact!

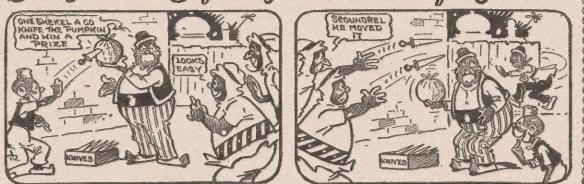
4. Now, when he rumbled this Ben went all over comical and started dancing in rage. That was his undoing! Yes, he danced on the coalhole lid—and nunk was hiding down below!



5. Naturally, when he heard the knocking uncle popped up to see what the fuss was about! That did it! Ben went flying, and the next tick his napper did a double rat-tat on the road!

6. Ben came all over alike after that. Didn't even know how to stand up for hours! But Nicky and Sissy had a fine game with him! Yes, they pretended he was just a silly goat!

Seezum & Squeezum, the Artful Arabs.



1. "Coo!" said the fat Squeezum when he saw Ali Ben Twistum with the knives and the pumpkin. "This looks money for jam! Win a prize by knifing the pumpkin! Here we go!" And he invested his last shekel in a go!

2. But Ali Ben Twistum was an artful laddie! Mps! As the Arabs flung their knives, so he ducked with the pumpkin, and, of course, they missed. "Bah!" snapped Seezum. "We've been caught!" But someone else was caught, too!

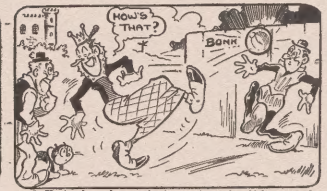
3. Yes, those knives travelled onwards and neatly pinned a bad lad's coat-tails to the fence. "Coo!" said Squeezum. "That's a different tail, brother! Methinks we are in for a slight drop of reward!" And verily did he speak truly. Mps!

4. Up bowled a large lump of Arab bobby, and forthwith collared the bad lad, all the same time handing over a large bag of reward. "All for you, lads!" said he. "You've captured a prize!" And wasn't old Twistum annoyed!

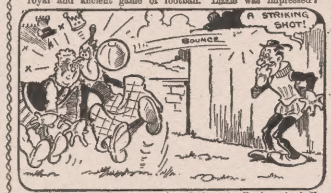
LIZZIE AND HER COMICAL COURTIERS

THE QUEEN AND HER KNIGHTS SCORE ONCE AGAIN!

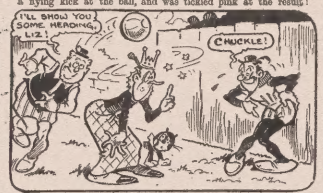
1. Sir Walter Rally and Sir Francis Hake invited Lizzie out to the brickfield at the back of the palace there to show her ye royal and ancient game of football. Lizzie was impressed!



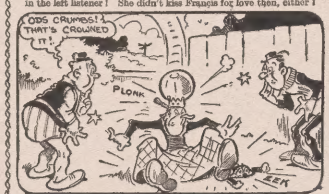
2. Having been shown only sixteen times, the old lass seemed to get the idea, and sending Wally in to keep goal, Queenie took a flying kick at the ball, and was tickled pink at the result!



3. But she wasn't quite so pleased about it all when the ball bounced back off the palace fence and smote her a fourpenny one in the left listener! She didn't kiss Francis for love then, either!



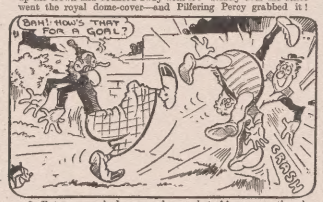
4. But Sir Francis thought her royaltiness was just being playful, and he decided to show her how to do a spot of headwork. Up went the ball from his dome whilst Liz counted stars!



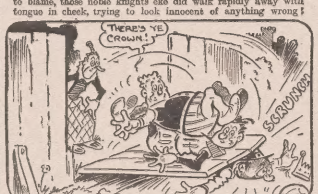
5. And with a right hearty thud said ball came down again! That crowned it! Yes, the ball dropped smack on to the royal lassie's dome, and she parked herself down with a thud on the floor!

6. But the worst was yet to come! The bouncing ball caught up the crown and bounced away with it! Neatly over the fence went the royal dome-cover—and Pilfering Percy grabbed it!

7. Seeing the which and realising that of a truth were they to blame, those noble knights ske did walk rapidly away with tongue in cheek, trying to look innocent of anything wrong!



8. But ye queen had recovered somewhat of her senses, though none of her good temper! Coming up on the wing she took a flying kick—and sure enough she scored her goal with the knights!



9. But better still, that sudden crash sent the fence down—and it landed neatly on the neck of Percy just as he was picking the diamonds and rubies and emeralds out of the royal crown!

10. And so pleased was the queen at recovering her state bonnet that she consented to continue the game! The dizzy Percy person made quite a good crossbar, slap me if he didn't! 16-11-29

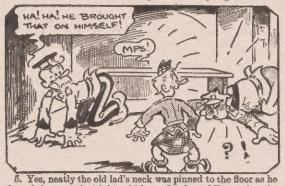
SANDY AND DUSTY THE REGIMENTAL RASCALS

1. "Hey, you two lop-sided chunks of half-cured bacon!" roared old Sergeant Rorter one fine morn. "Hop along and clear out the guard-room—and do the job thoroughly, see?"

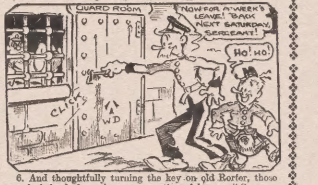
2. Now, those rascals are nothing if not thorough, and they did the job well and truly! Yes, they even turned the bad lads out of the guard-room cells in their thoroughness!

3. Now, Rorter hadn't meant that, of course, and he got quite peevish when he saw his pet prisoners escaping. "Right!" he roared. "You've released the prisoners—in you go instead!"

4. And he gave Sandy and Dusty such a push that those lads went flying. Unfortunately for the sergeant, Dusty fell on a form, which came spinning over, handing Rorter a tasty one!



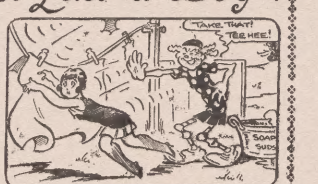
5. Yes, neatly the old lad's neck was pinned to the floor as he dusted the ground with his whiskers. Sandy and Dusty thought it would be the right time to do a drop of quick escaping!



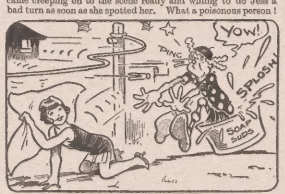
6. And thoughtfully turning the key on old Rorter, those rascals helped themselves to a portion of leave. "See you next Saturday, sergeant dear!" said they, and vanished.

Jessie Joy, Just Like a Boy.

1. Our joyful lassie was helping her old mum do the washing one fine Monday, when all of a quickness that Sophie Slink came creeping on to the scene ready and willing to do Jess a bad turn as soon as she spotted her. What a poisonous person!



2. Yes, as soon as she could Sophie gave poor old Jess a hearty push, and our little lass only saved herself from a nasty fall by clutching the tablecloth she was hanging out to dry. But that clutch changed the outlook for Sophie!



3. You see, the pegs came flying off the line as Jess tugged the cloth down, and one of them smote the Slinky one a sly one on the nose! Sophie was so surprised that she staggered back—and sat well and truly in the old bath of washing-water!

4. "Ha, ha!" laughed Jessie, as she picked herself up and spotted Sophie crawling home all wet and wobbly. "You look a bit of a wash-out, my girl! And it jolly well serves you right!" And so it jolly well does, doesn't it, dear ones?

JERRY JONES AND UNCLE BONES

Don't miss this complete story if you enjoy a hearty laugh.

IT was a bright, sunny Saturday afternoon, and Jerry Jones and his girl chum, Ethel Bright, were strolling through the park, while Uncle Bones, Jerry's pet parrot, hopped along beside them.

For some seconds now Ethel had been strangely silent, and Jerry turned to her suddenly.

"I'll give you a penny for your thoughts," he said smilingly.

"A penny?" The girl awoke from her reverie with a start. "Oh, I see what you mean!" she went on, with a light laugh. "It's funny that you should offer a penny for them, because I was thinking of money."

Jerry arched his eyebrows inquiringly.

"Oh!" he said. "What's the big idea?"

"Well, I was just thinking how nice it would be if one had sufficient money to buy what one wanted."

"It would be nice," agreed Jerry, with a broad smile. "But you are not thinking of buying a motor-car or anything like that, are you?"

"Hardly," returned Ethel. "But I would like to go to Simpson's this afternoon and have one of their posh teas. I haven't been there for such a long time."

Jerry shrugged his sturdy young shoulders, and pursed his lips.

"Of course, you would get expensive tastes like that when we are broke!" he said. "Why, two teas at Simpson's would cost two shillings, and we haven't got sixpence between us! I suggest that you allow your thoughts to run on much cheaper lines."

"Run 'em on a clothes-line!" squawked Uncle Bones, suddenly flying into the air just above their heads. "Have you got a knob of sugar on you, mate?"

Jerry grinned.

"No, I haven't got a knob of sugar, uncle," he said. "And please don't call me mate!"

"All right, mate!" squawked the parrot.

Jerry frowned, and tried to look stern, but Ethel spoilt everything by laughing heartily.

"Now, don't encourage him, just when I'm trying to teach him good manners!" protested Jerry. "I'm going to——"

He broke off suddenly as he saw Uncle Bones, who had flown some distance ahead of them up the path, start pecking at something on the ground.

"Look what I've found!" suddenly shouted the wily old bird. "I'm on Tom Tiddler's ground, picking up gold and silver!"

"I wish you were!" laughed Jerry, hurrying forward. "Come here, uncle, and let me see what you've found!"

A moment later he stooped beside his pet, and, to his surprise, he saw the parrot pecking at what looked, at first glance, like a grey glass bead.

"What is it, Jerry?" inquired Ethel, peering over the boy's shoulder as he examined the small bead in the palm of his hand. "Why, it looks like a pearl. Perhaps it's worth a lot of money!"

"And perhaps it isn't," smiled Jerry. "It doesn't look to me as though it's of much value. I've seen pearls as good as that in the sixpenny bazaar—haven't you?"

"H'm—yes!" murmured Ethel thoughtfully. "But it's rather a nice colour."

"That may be," nodded Jerry. "But I've seen pearls with just as good colour in the bazaar, and if anybody offered me two shillings for this one, I'd take it like a shot!"

"May I have a look at it, sonny?"

A low, whining voice sounded behind the chums, and Jerry swung round swiftly on his heels, to confront an old man with a long grey beard who was leaning on a stout stick.

"Do you know anything about pearls, sir?" asked the boy quickly.

The old man shook his head slowly.

"No, I don't, sonny," he said "but I happened to see you pick up something, and heard a bit of your conversation. It's a pearl you've found, isn't it?"

"Yes; this is it," said Jerry, holding up the pearl for the old man to inspect. "Do you think it is worth anything?"

The old man grunted to himself as he held the pearl up to the sunlight and twisted it slowly in his fingers; then, to the chums' surprise, he placed it in his mouth.

"Here, half a minute! Don't go and swallow it!" laughed Jerry. "It's a pearl, not a pill, you know."

The old man's whiskers began to wobble as he chuckled softly to himself, and Uncle Bones fluttered on to his shoulder.

"Do that again, gran'dad!" squawked the wily old bird. "I like to see your doormat waggle!"

"Oh dear!" gasped the old man. "What a funny bird!"

"And what a funny old gran'dad you are!" shouted Uncle Bones. "Let's have a swing on your whiskers, gran'dad!"

"Well, I never!" exclaimed the old man. "I've never heard a parrot talk like that before! Would you like to sell this bird, sonny?" he added, turning to Jerry.

The boy smiled and shook his head.

"No, sir. Why, I wouldn't part with uncle for all the money in the world—would I, uncle?"

"No, mate!" croaked the parrot.

"Now, that's quite enough of that!" said Jerry, shaking his forefinger reprovingly at his pet. "You mustn't call me mate."

"But I can call gran'dad old natty-whiskers, can't I?" shouted Uncle Bones.

It was as much as Jerry could do to keep a straight face, and out of the corner of his eye he saw Ethel trying to stifle her laughter by thrusting a handkerchief into her mouth.

"I hope you will forgive my pet's remarks, sir," said Jerry quickly. "He doesn't mean any harm, you know."

"Oh, that's quite all right!" mumbled the old man through his whiskers. "I don't mind a bit. I'm very fond of birds myself. "Well," he added, "I suppose I had better be toddling along now. Good-day to you both!"

"Toodle-oo, gran'dad, and don't let your whiskers dangle in the soup!" shouted Uncle Bones.

As the old man toddled off along the path, both Jerry and Ethel almost doubled up with laughter.

"I say," smiled the girl, as she gazed after the bent figure, "isn't he a funny-looking old man?"

"He certainly is," nodded Jerry. "But he's a jolly good sort. I know a number of men who would have turned quite nasty at uncle's remarks, and—— Suffering shrimps, Ethel, the old fellow's gone off with our pearl! Hi! Just a minute, sir!"

The old man was apparently deaf, for he still went toddling on as Jerry shouted; but breaking into a fast trot, the boy soon drew abreast of him.

"Excuse me a moment, sir," he panted, "but you've got my pearl, I believe!"

The old man pulled up sharply, and for a split second his eyes narrowed under their shaggy brows.

"Well, well! I never did!" he remarked presently, and his whiskers waggled in a comical fashion as he chuckled softly to himself. "Why, of course, I've got your pearl, sonny. Here it is," he added, straightening out the palm of his hand. "Dear, dear! I'm getting so absent-minded that I clean forgot that I had not returned it to you. I'm very sorry, sonny!"

"Oh, that's all right, sir!" said Jerry smilingly. "I don't suppose it is of any value."

The old man shook his head slowly.

"I can assure you that it isn't worth much," he said; "but if you are willing to sell it, I'll give you two shillings for it. It's more than it is worth, mind you, but my daughter has just lost a pearl about this size from a brooch I gave her for a birthday present, and I could get it fitted quite cheaply. So if you care to——"

Jerry turned quickly to his chum.

"What do you say, Ethel?" he whispered. "We can have a fine tea at Simpson's with the money. Shall we let him have it?"

"Yes—rather!" replied the girl. "Two shillings is better than nothing at all, and if it's going to help the old man, I'm all for it."

"Right-ho—that settles it!" said Jerry, turning to the old man. "We'll take two shillings for the pearl!"

A moment later a pearl and a two-shilling-piece changed hands, and after wishing one another good-day, the chums and the old man parted company.

"Well, I think we've seen enough of the park now, Ethel," grinned Jerry, as they hurried towards the gates; "but it's been a lucky walk for us, and you've got your wish for a slap-up tea at Simpson's."

Both the chums were in high spirits as they walked swiftly towards the High Street, but as they were about to pass a police station, they received a rude shock. A notice-board outside the station attracted Ethel's attention, and as she glanced at it she gave vent to a low gasp of surprise, and clutched Jerry by the arm, dragging him to a sudden halt beside her.

"I say, look at that notice!" she whispered breathlessly.

And with wide-open eyes Jerry read the following words:

"LOST.

A handsome Oriental Pearl, believed to have been dropped in the vicinity of Newlands Park on Thursday evening. A reward of TEN POUNDS will be paid to the finder on return of the above to the nearest police station."

Three times Jerry read the notice, and as he turned to his chum and their eyes met he shrugged his shoulders.

"Well, what do you think of that?" he remarked bitterly.

"Do you think that is the pearl that we found in the park?"

Ethel's voice was tense with excitement, and inwardly she was hoping that Jerry would answer in the negative.

"I don't think there is much doubt about it being the one," returned the boy dismally. "And I bet that old rascal knew something about it when he offered us two shillings for it!"

"But it didn't appear to be worth all that money," broke in Ethel. "Oh, dear! What a couple of fools we've been!"

"We certainly have," agreed Jerry. "But it's no good grumbling now. We sold the pearl to the old man, so we have no claim to a share in the reward, even. It's jolly hard luck, but we must make the best of it. Come on; let's go and cheer ourselves up over a good tea with the two shillings!"

And with sad and thoughtful expressions on their faces, the two chums entered Simpson's cafe.

They had quite a delightful tea, and they enjoyed every crumb of the beautifully-toasted scones, but all the time they were thinking of the reward they had lost; and the more Jerry thought the more convinced he became that the old man with the whiskers had wilfully diddled them.

So carefully had Jerry ordered the tea that the bill came to exactly two shillings, and as the boy strolled up to the cash-desk, where several people were waiting to settle their bills, Ethel passed through the swing doors to wait for him outside.

For some minutes she waited, and then, growing a wee bit anxious and impatient, she made to enter the cafe; but as she reached the first step, Jerry came flying through the swing doors, his face flushed and a wild look in his eyes that frightened the girl.

"Why, what's the mat——" she began, but Jerry cut her short with a curt shake of his head.

"Don't ask any questions now," he exclaimed excitedly. "They're after me—they want to arrest me. We've got to run—run like the wind!"

And before Ethel quite knew what was happening, she felt Jerry grip her by the arm, and found herself running like a hare beside him.

Down several narrow turnings they twisted without speaking a word to one another, and at last Jerry pulled up pantingly quite near to the police station where they had seen the reward notice for the lost pearl.

"I'm sorry—if I've—I've frightened you, Ethel," he panted out at length, "but I got an awful shock when I went to pay the bill. That—that two-shilling-piece which the old man gave us was a dud one, and the cashier wanted to have me arrested for passing counterfeit coin. He said he had had a lot of dud money given him lately.

"Of course, I was in a terribly awkward position," went on Jerry, "because I was unable to give him another two shillings, so I grabbed the dud coin from the counter and ran!"

"Then you haven't paid for the teas?" broke in Ethel, her pretty blue eyes opening wide in a surprised stare.

"Of course not. How could I?" retorted Jerry. "I hadn't another penny on me. I feel now that perhaps it would have been better if I had waited and explained matters to them; but I was so scared when the cashier suggested sending for the police that I just bunked. I—I think I had better go into this police station and make a full confession of the whole affair. What do you think, Ethel?"

For a moment the girl did not reply. She just stood staring straight ahead, with a troubled look in her eyes. Suddenly her body stiffened, and she turned swiftly to Jerry, who was gazing thoughtfully at the door of the police station.

"Quick, Jerry—look!" she exclaimed, in a low whisper. "Here comes the old man who gave us the dud two-shilling-piece! I wonder if he is bringing the pearl along to the station to claim the reward?"

"I bet he is," nodded Jerry. "But I'm going to have a few words to say to him before he does!"

The old man had almost reached the station before he observed the chums waiting for him, and then he half turned, as if to retrace his steps; but Jerry hurried forward and gripped him by the arm.

"I suppose you've come along to return the pearl and collect the reward, eh?" he asked tersely.

The old man grunted inaudibly in his whiskers.

"Well, what if I have?" he snapped suddenly. "The reward will be mine, and I'm not going to share it with you! I bought the pearl from you, so you have no claim on me!"

"I know that, you cunning old rascal!" said Jerry fiercely. "And I'm not asking you to share the reward, but I'm going to ask you to change the two-shilling-piece you gave me!"

"Why?"

"Because it's a dud!"

"A dud?" echoed the old man. "Nonsense! I don't believe it. You can't twist that yarn on me!"

"And you can't twist this dud two-shilling-piece on me!" retorted Jerry. "You've already twisted us out of the reward for the pearl, but you are not going to get away with this!"

"Well, you are not going to get any more money out of me!" snarled the old man, as he endeavoured to brush past the boy. "I'm going into the station. Now, get out of my way!"

"Then I'm coming in with you," returned Jerry quickly, "and I shall tell the inspector the whole story. There's been a lot of dud coins distributed in the district lately, and I'm sure the police will be glad to know where this one came from. Anyway, I'll tell them."

The old man pulled up sharply as Jerry spoke, and stood for a few moments chewing his whiskers thoughtfully.

"Now, look here, sonny," he said at length; and Jerry was surprised at the kindly tone of the old man's voice. "I don't want to be hard on you. Now, if you'll give me the dud two shillings back, I'll give you five sound shillings for it. I can't say fairer than that, can I?"

"Well, you could," replied Jerry. "You could suggest that we share the reward of ten pounds; but as I've already sold you the pearl, I'll stand by the bargain."

"Then you agree to accept the five shillings, and say no more about it?" said the old man eagerly.

Jerry nodded.

And as the old man counted the five shillings into the boy's outstretched hand the chums heard him chuckle softly behind his whiskers.

Then, as they watched him hobble along to the station, Jerry turned to his chum.

"Well, I suppose we mustn't grumble, Ethel," he said. "We've certainly lost half the reward, but we've got five good, perfectly sound shillings out of the old rascal, anyway. I suppose I had better get along to Simpson's cafe and pay that bill."

As the two chums drew level with the police station they saw the old man in earnest conversation with a sergeant at the front door.

"I've found the pearl you are offering a reward for, sergeant!" they heard the old man squeak, in his high-pitched voice. "I—er—I found it in the park. Here it is!"

The sergeant examined the pearl for a few moments, and then, to the chums' surprise, he handed it back to the old man.

"That's not the one," he said gruffly. "You could buy that in any bazaar for sixpence. The real pearl was found yesterday and returned to the owner. I was just coming out to remove the notice when you came up. Now, pop off—I'm busy!"

The chums didn't wait to hear any more. With five shillings jingling in his trouser-pocket, Jerry ran all the way to Simpson's cafe, and settled his bill for the teas.

The cashier was inclined to be huffy at first, but Jerry's honest face soon convinced him that he had had no intention of dodging payment of the bill or of passing dud money, and a few minutes later the two chums hurried home, laughing to themselves over the way the old man had cheated himself in his efforts to cheat them.

(Another complete adventure of Jerry Jones, Ethel Bright, and Uncle Bones will appear in next Saturday's JESTER. Order your copy TO-DAY.)

THIS WEEK:

THE MIDNIGHT ADVENTURE!

The First Meeting.

"YOU have often heard me say that the streets of London teem with adventure and adventurers," said old Tom Martin, the night-watchman. "And since I read the other day that big-game hunters go forth to shoot lions and elephants in motor-cars these days, I am beginning to think that there is even more romance and adventure to be found in England than in the wilds of Africa. Which brings me to my story for to-night."

Tom waited whilst his youthful audience settled themselves more comfortably about his glowing fire, and then he began:

Jack Fisher had exactly one shilling and the clothes he stood up in when he stepped ashore at Tilbury Docks late one foggy November afternoon.

Two years ago Jack had left that selfsame dock on a hopeful voyage to Australia as an emigrant; to-day he had returned with hope dead in his soul.

For two years he had struggled against adversity abroad; then, sick of it all, he had stowed away on board the Dobson Bay, determined to try his luck in the Old Country once more.

Four days out from Australia hunger had driven him from his hiding-place in the coal bunkers of the ship, and he had been discovered. Luckily, the captain was a humane and understanding man. He allowed the youth to sign on for the voyage, letting him thus work his passage home.

It was too late to think about looking for work on the day he landed. But new hope had sprung up in the young man's heart when once more his feet were treading the streets of his native land.

The shilling he had soon went in food, and cold though the night promised to be, Jack did not much mind the prospect of having to sleep out—he was used to tougher hardships than that.

It was just after midnight—in fact, the hour had chimed from Big Ben a few moments before—when Jack Fisher found himself in a deserted street made all the more gloomy by the yellowish fog that still hung about.

Then suddenly, out of the gloom, he heard the swift patter of running footsteps, and a moment later a figure loomed up before him.

The figure was that of a pretty, well-dressed girl, and even as she drew near to him Jack heard her panting as if distressed by some violent exertions.

To the young man's amazement, she stopped when she saw him.

"I've got it, Jack!" she said swiftly. "Quickly! Take it and get away—he's after me! Hark! I can hear him coming even now! I'll meet you later, as arranged!"

Saying which, the girl suddenly thrust a fat and heavy pocket wallet into Jack Fisher's hands, and a moment later vanished into the fog.

A myriad thoughts ran through the young man's mind. So staggered was he by this sudden meeting, that he had no time to cry out after the girl before she had gone. Then he heard further footsteps, heavier ones. A moment later a policeman came pounding up to the spot, and two strong hands went out to grip him.

Panic seized Jack Fisher then. The stern face of the man in uniform made him very conscious of the wallet he still held in his hand.

Stolen property! The pretty girl must have mistaken him for a confederate, thrust the wallet into his hand, and made off, knowing that the police were close behind her!

Forgetful of everything except that liberty was a precious thing, Jack Fisher thrust out his right hand and pushed the constable from him. He saw the man stagger back, wobbling uncertainly. Then he turned and ran—ran as hard as he could into the fog.

The cell door opened and a young man and a girl came towards him. Then the girl spoke, and in a flash Jack Fisher recognised her voice. "We bring you good news, Mr. Fisher," the girl said softly. "You are to be released!"

Dimly he was aware of a startled cry and a thud behind him. Then silence save for the pattering of his own footsteps, and he raced to get as far away from the policeman as he could.

For some minutes he ran through the silent streets. Then, finding that he was not pursued, he slowed down to a walk, and strove to collect his scattered thoughts.

With a start he realised that the wallet that the girl had thrust upon him was still in his pocket. His first thought was to snatch it out and fling it far away from him. But something restrained him, and then, pausing under the yellow light of a street lamp, he examined the wallet.

Then he made the startling discovery that the little leather case was filled with banknotes. Crisp, rustling banknotes! There must have been at least two hundred pounds within the wallet!

For a moment temptation gripped him. What couldn't he do with two hundred pounds?

Two hundred pounds—and he was homeless, with no place to lay his head on that foggy, cold night!

He thrust the wallet back into his pocket and continued his tramp.

All night long he paced the streets of London wrestling with his great temptation. Dawn came at last, and, hungry and tired, Jack Fisher sank down on a seat on the Thames Embankment and strove to snatch a little sleep

The rustling of a paper beside him made him open his eyes and glance to his left. A newsboy was busy sorting out his morning papers preparatory to going off on his round.

A flaring headline caught the young man's eye as he gazed at the stacked papers. Then once more sudden fear gripped at his heart.

"CONSTABLE FOUND UNCONSCIOUS. BRUTAL ATTACK IN WESTMINSTER."

Breathlessly Jack Fisher read the headlines and leaned forward to see the paragraph beneath them.

"A startling midnight mystery began last night, when Constable William Mason, Q Division, was found suffering from severe head injuries in a little court off West Street, S.W. It seems that the constable was attacked in West Street and rendered unconscious by savage blows, and was apparently just able to crawl to the little court before he collapsed. The police theory of the motive for the attack suggests that the officer detected some unknown person in an act of lawlessness, and endeavoured to make an arrest. A scuffle ensued, and the policeman was knocked down. His condition is serious, giving rise to grave anxiety A protracted search of London is in progress, and the police are anxious to interview a young man who was seen by several passers-by in the neighbourhood. A curious fact——"

Jack Fisher could read no more. The newsboy had gathered up his papers and was off upon his task.

Murder!

That ugly word would obtrude upon the mind of the homeless outcast. If the policeman died then he, Jack Fisher, was a murderer!

For a moment panic seized him. He wanted to start to run—anywhere, it did not matter where.

Then suddenly he took a grip on himself and became calm.

After all the whole thing had been an accident. He couldn't prove it, but he knew that if he gave himself up and told an honest straightforward story that, at least, would count in his favour.

Yes! He felt that he could never be at peace until he had told his strange story.

There and then, with his hand tightly clutching the wallet in his pocket, Jack Fisher made his way to the nearest police station.

The Second Meeting.

THEY listened to Jack Fisher's statement very carefully at the police station, and detectives from Scotland Yard were sent for.

These astute men questioned him closely, but as he had told the absolute truth there was no shaking his story.

The part that they didn't believe was obviously the incident of the girl and the banknotes.

Jack's candid admission that he had pushed the policeman, causing him to fall and thus injure his head was plausible; but there was little doubt that the police could not fit the girl and the wallet into the story.

"You say that this girl was young and pretty, and that she called you by name?" said one of the detectives. "If your story is true, that you weren't waiting there for her to bring the notes to you, how was it she knew your name?"

"I can't say," said the young man. "She must have mistaken me for someone else. After all, there must be thousands of 'Jacks' in London, sir!"

"H'm!" said the detective. "Would you know the lady again if you saw her?"

"Well," said the youth slowly, "I only saw her for a second and it was foggy, you know. I couldn't positively swear to her again."

"H'm!" said the detective. "We'll investigate your story anyway. Meanwhile you'll be charged with assaulting the police. We'll apply for a remand until we see what's going to happen to Constable Mason. Take him to the cells, sergeant."

It was a miserable day that Jack Fisher spent in the bare whitewashed cell of the station.

He was a prey to the gloomiest thoughts and every ambition that had been in his heart was crushed under this terrible blow that Fate had dealt him.

Then towards evening the cell door was opened and Jack looked up to see a young man and a girl standing in the doorway.

He stared at them vacantly. More detectives, he supposed. Then the girl spoke and in a flash he recognised her voice.

"We—we bring you good news, Mr. Fisher," the girl said softly. "You are to be released at once! Thanks to you, a desperate rogue has been trapped."

The young man who accompanied the girl crossed the cell and laid his arm on Jack's shoulder.

"Cheer up, old chap!" he said sympathetically. "Everything is going to come right for you now."

"I—I don't understand," said Jack rising wearily. "You—you are the lady who gave me that wallet of notes, aren't you?"

"Yes," said the girl. "Marion Dalton is my name! This is my brother Jack."

"I'm a detective, Fisher," said Dalton then. "And I've been engaged on a rather intricate forgery case. Marion's been helping me. Last night when she thrust that wallet into your hands she mistook you for me. You see, I was supposed to be where you were in disguise. I was delayed, however, and thus Marion mistook us in the fog. Those notes my sister had were forgeries; the proofs we needed to lay the forger by the heels. Marion had to use trickery—in other words, she had to steal that wallet to get the necessary evidence I needed. She managed it last night, and then made the mistake of passing the wallet on to you! But everything is all right now!"

"But—but the policeman?" said Jack quickly. "You may be able to explain away the notes, Mr. Dalton, but that doesn't help me in regard to the assault charge! I certainly pushed the policeman over, causing him to injure his head!"

"You didn't push any policeman over!" said Dalton, with a smile. "I've just cleared that little point up with the Yard. What happened was this: Our forger discovered that Marion here had got the forged notes we needed. He went after her to get them back. He knew that she would have friends near at hand and he was at his wits' end as to how to get back the notes. In a flash he conceived what he thought was a bright idea—but what was really his undoing. In the darkness of the little court off West Street, the crook attacked Constable Mason and knocked him out. Then, clad in the constable's uniform jacket and helmet he went off after Marion again, hoping to detain her in his disguise as a law officer. It wasn't a policeman at all who tried to grapple with you—it was a crook wearing policeman's clothes! Your push knocked the forger out. A few minutes after the blow I turned up, couldn't see anything of Marion at all and thought the whole thing had gone wrong. Then I found the real policeman whom my forger had knocked about. I never connected him with my case at all—until I met Marion last night and heard her yarn and guessed what had happened. Meanwhile, the forger had got away with a cut head, but I was able to trace him. He's in gaol now—to answer to the very charge they're holding you for!"

"Then—then I didn't hurt anyone seriously?" said Jack, in tones of relief.

"No!" said Dalton. "No one except a crook, and even he wasn't too badly hurt! I've got to apologise for the inconvenience my sister's mistake has caused you, Mr. Fisher. I will, of course, compensate you for any loss you have suffered and——"

"Don't let's talk about that," said Jack Fisher, all his hopefulness restored at last. "I'm only too glad to find such an end to my midnight adventure."

"Nevertheless Dalton did compensate Jack Fisher," concluded old Tom. "Yes, when he heard of the young man's struggles against adversity he set about finding him a good job—and succeeded. So after all, Jack Fisher lost nothing on account of his strange midnight adventure. Good-night, all!"

(Another complete tale told by old Tom Martin, the night-watchman, will appear in next Saturday's JESTER.) 16-11-29

THE CASE OF THE THREE FEATHERS

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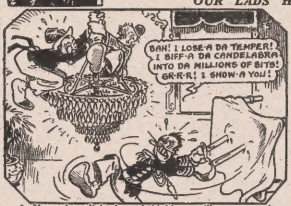
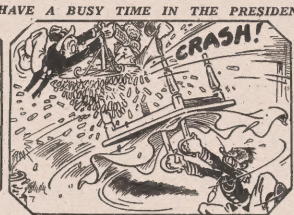
THE WORLD WIDE WANDERINGS OF BASIL & BERT

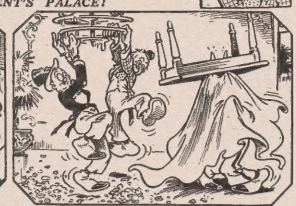
OUR LADS HAVE A BUSY TIME IN THE PRESIDENT'S PALACE!



1. If you do a slight drop of thinking you'll soon remember that Basil and Bert had got themselves a new job as sort of joint Presidents of Mexico. That's right, they'd helped to win a revolution and for the time being were great pals with the revolutionary general. But they weren't at all friendly with the ex-president, who proceeded to be quite nasty to them!



2. Having chased them up the candelabra and got his swords stuck in the table, the ex-president expressed a desire to do something really sensational, and he certainly made the pieces fly when, catching at his swords once more, he swung the table over his head—and knocked the cut-glass candelabra to smithereens. But at the same time he tied himself up!

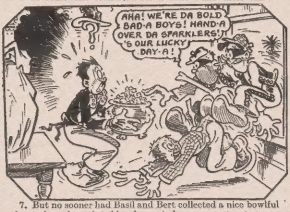


3. Yes, the old lad had forgotten the tablecloth and in a couple of shakes he found himself all tangled up in this. When Basil and Bert spotted such an opportunity they weren't slow to grab it. "This is where we come to earth, sir," said Bert. "I think we can enlighten him better if we go down and tie him up in knots. You can't talk to 'em when they're free!"

4. The old ex-pres had got himself in quite the right type of fix to assist our ramblers. All they had to do was to tie a piece of rope round the cloth and thence round the old lad's legs and he was helpless. "Well, he's bound to behave himself for a little while now, sir!" said Bert. "I bet his movements will be somewhat restricted for a little while after this!"

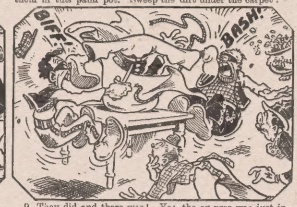
5. And to make matters even more secure our lads righted the table once more and up went the ex-pres in the bundle in a most undignified way. "That's better!" said Bert. "He's turned up once too often, sir! No wonder his countrymen turned him down!" "Yes!" said Basil. "And now let's get the palace cleaned up. It's in a mess for visiting day!"

6. The great trouble was the shattered candelabra. Those cut-glass dingle-danglums had gone into smithereens as we told you, and those lads got really busy picking up the pieces and making the homs look a little more shipshape. "That's right, Bert!" said Basil. "Pick up the baubles and drop them in this palm pot. Sweep the dirt under the carpet!"



7. But no sooner had Basil and Bert collected a nice bowlful of cut-glass than the old palace window gave entry to more trouble. Yes, a couple of bold, bad burglars on the look-out for anything in the way of business happened to pop through the window and spot that bowl of glass. There and then the bad lads jumped to the conclusion that the glass was diamonds!

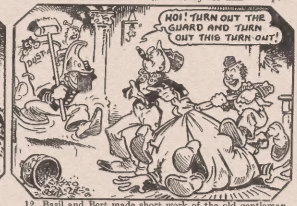
8. Having jumped to the conclusion the next thing to do was to jump at Basil and Bert and grab the valuables. Our lads didn't mind parting up in the slightest—but when the burglars spotted the bundle on the table and took it to be something of value Basil began to get the wind up slightly. "I'm!" he muttered. "If they open that there'll be a riot, I bet!"



9. They did and there was! Yes, the ex-pres was just in the mood to kick, and no sooner did the bad lads slit the sheet to take a peep inside than the ex-pres let fly right and left! Yes, his number nine court shoes caught them bad lads a biff per each and made them think another revolution had suddenly started. But Basil and Bert were ready for him! Mps!

10. They knew the ex-president didn't like them a little bit. They knew that he'd be very rude to them the moment he got a chance. So they seized their opportunity with one hand per each—said opportunity being the swords that were still stuck in the table. With all their force our lads bent those trusty blades backwards—and then let them go with a ping!

11. Things came to a head with some suddenness! The ex-president person was presented with a couple of bits on the ear-drums that completely changed all his plans for him! Yes, he had meant to cut up rusty but instead he just smiled a soppy sort of smile, closed his eyes, laid down on the table, rolled off it and then faded away into sweet dreamy dreamland!



12. Basil and Bert made short work of the old gentleman then! Yes, they picked him up and parked him on top of the two bad lads, rolled all three tightly in the tablecloth and then played a tune on the palace bells until a few men-at-arms appeared. "Send us the court dustman!" ordered Basil. And when he appeared away went a bundle of trouble!

MORE FUN AND EXCITEMENT IN THE PALACE NEXT SATURDAY CHUMS!

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